

DIGITAL CARTOON DRAWING SECRETS



You CAN Draw **DIGITAL** Cartoons!

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Digital Cartoon Drawing

Introduction to Digital Art

Until recently the only way to create cartoons and artwork involved using pens pencils paper and canvas. However it's now possible to create art without ever using traditional art materials, by using your computer and some additional software.

There are a number of different software packages which can be used for digital art, including Adobe PhotoShop, Adobe Illustrator, Corel Painter, and animated cartoons can even be created for websites using Macromedia Flash (now also owned by Adobe).

The most common graphics software package, and certainly the one most likely to already be installed on your own computer, is Photoshop. Adobe Photoshop is a graphics editor which includes some text and vector graphics capabilities, it is the most popular for commercial image manipulation, and is available for Mac OS and Microsoft Windows.

Packages such as Adobe Illustrator, Corel Painter, and Macromedia Flash are designed specifically for commercial illustration, art, and animation respectively, and so are much better suited to large scale professional drawing, and consequently for creating professional cartoons. However it is unlikely your current computer will have any of these packages installed, and they are very expensive to purchase, each costing many hundreds of dollars at least.

There *are* other alternatives to PhotoShop if you do not have it already installed, for example my personal favorite GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program) is a free Open Source graphics editor with very similar capabilities to PhotoShop, and this can certainly be used for the kinds of simple drawings we are discussing in this book. In my opinion if you are interested in using software to create drawings you should download the free GIMP software as a first step (assuming you do not already own one of the other packages mentioned) and see if you are comfortable creating art in

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this way. If you find it suits you then at a later date you can always purchase more expensive software with more features.

Note there are also free software packages which are often preinstalled on your computer, for example Microsoft Paint which is included with MS Windows. Paint however does not include any of the more complex tools and will just cause frustration if you try and use it for cartoons.



As a simple example, I quickly created this outline of a cartoon man in GIMP using my mouse, created in exactly the same way as a physical drawing with pencil and paper. I created two ovals, plus lines for the arms and legs, I *think* he's disco-dancing, but his expression suggests something is about to fall on him..... From this outline we could create a complete cartoon character using GIMP much as we would in pencil and ink. And of course digital art has one huge advantage over traditional methods - it's much easier (and less messy) to erase all or part of the drawing and start again! However, as explained below, drawing with a mouse can be tricky. Note I used the "pencil" tool for this drawing, although you could just as easily use the "paint" tool. The pencil tool creates hard-edged lines and strokes, the paint tool more "fuzzy" marks.

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Tablets and Scanners

Tablets

One of the key problems when using your computer for art and drawing is the necessity to use a mouse. The mouse is no substitute for the control and detail you have when using a pencil or pen. If you attempt to create a simple curved line using the mouse in Photoshop or GIMP it will often turn out very blocky and unnatural. However it is possible to purchase a tablet, which connects to your computer and gives you a digital pad and pen with which to create natural lines and strokes. This makes drawing just as simple with the computer as with a pencil and paper.

A tablet setup, which can range in price from \$99 to nearer \$1000, provides you with various levels of pressure sensitivity, mimicking the different types and strength of stroke we are used to in traditional drawing. Of course the more expensive the hardware, the more powerful the features. Often the main difference between the cheaper and more expensive tablets is the size of the pad itself, in addition to an increased sensitivity range, but in most cases a smaller cheaper pad will be fine for cartoon work.

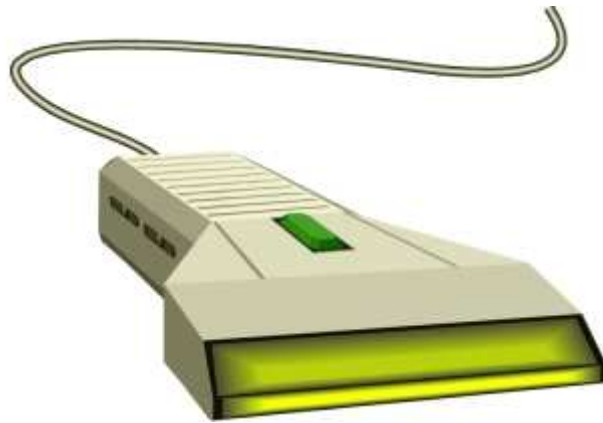


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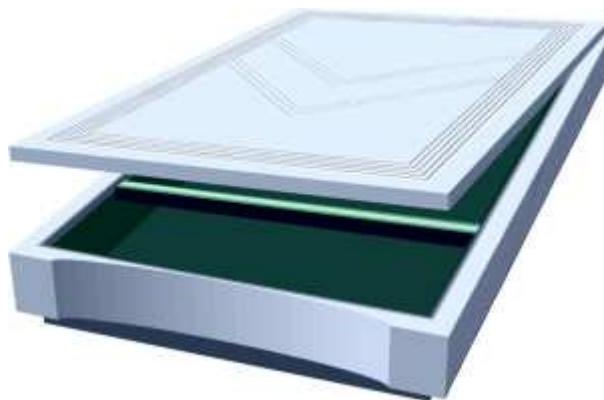
Scanners

A Scanner is defined as a peripheral for digitising documents (for example photos, slides, drawings, letters, documents), although it can also digitise small objects. It is essential if you need to load images for a web site.

There are two types of scanner you can buy for loading your images into your computer, the cheaper of the two is a handheld unit which you manually pass across the image:



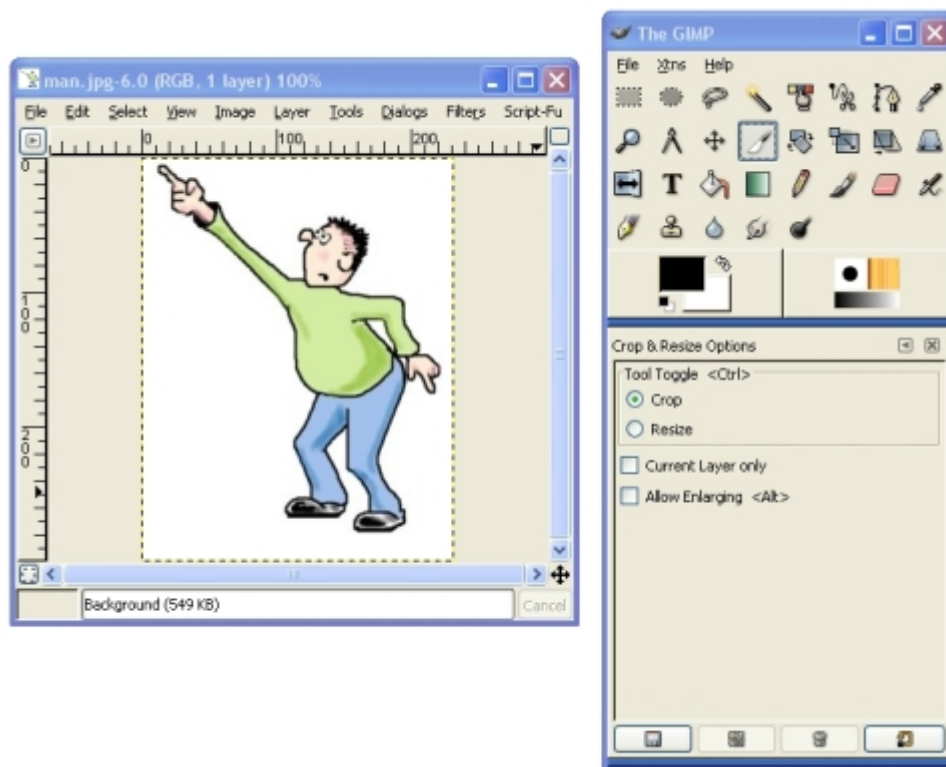
The more expensive option is a "flatbed" scanner, commonly made to accept A4 and Letter size documents. I personally use a flatbed scanner to record my images, as well as any important letters and documents I receive.



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Step by Step Digital Example (using GIMP)

Firstly let's look at GIMP itself, below is how it appears on your desktop, with at least two windows, one containing the current project - in this case my cartoon man.jpg - and the other window containing all the main GIMP tools and options. There are a huge number of tools and options available, too many to explain here, but for the purposes of a simple cartoon we only need to use a few. I will highlight which tools I use as I create this cartoon



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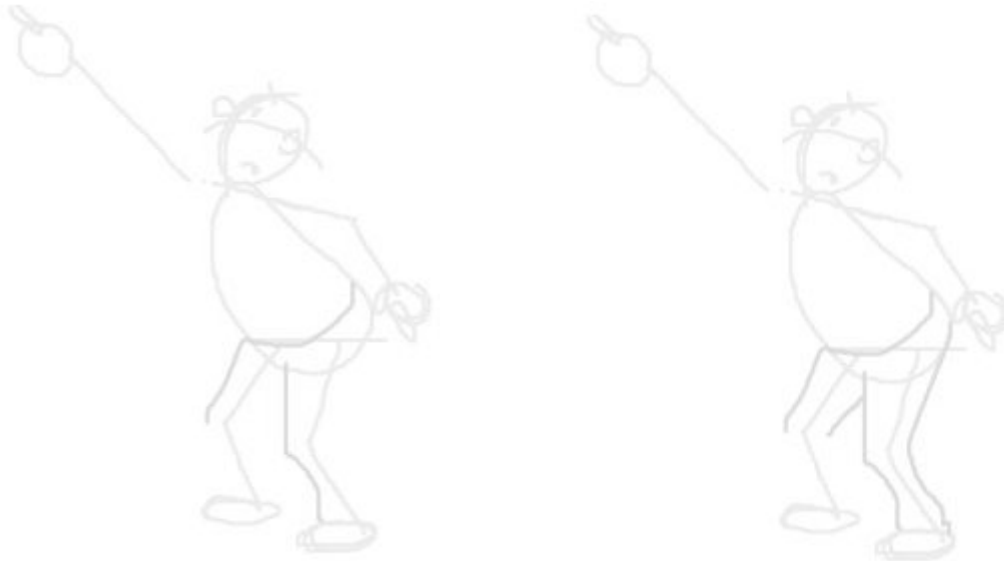


For this step-by-step demonstration I created this simple line and oval outline using the GIMP pencil tool, highlighted below:

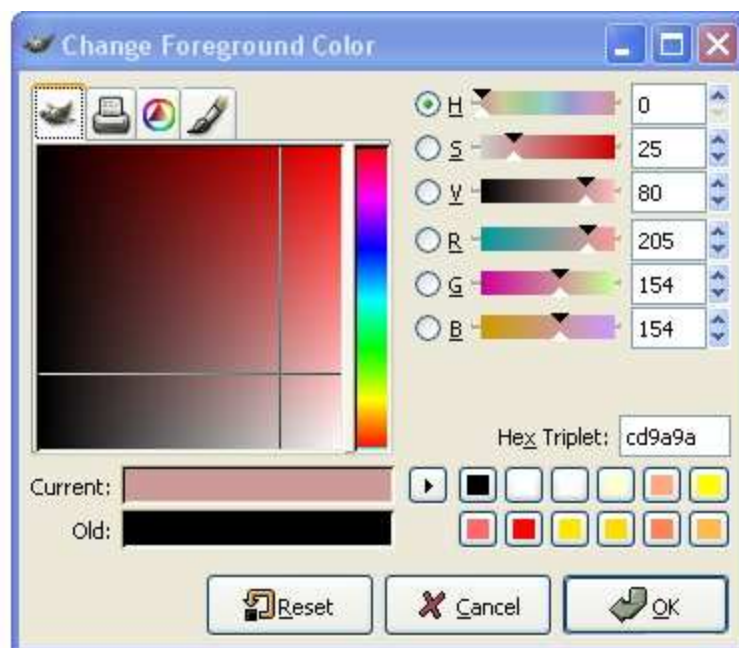


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The next step involves filling in the clothes and features, padding out those single lines into cartoon legs and arms. Note the lines added now are a **darker** color, this will be important later:



If you click on a color you will be presented with a screen as below, allowing you to pick or create **any** color you want :



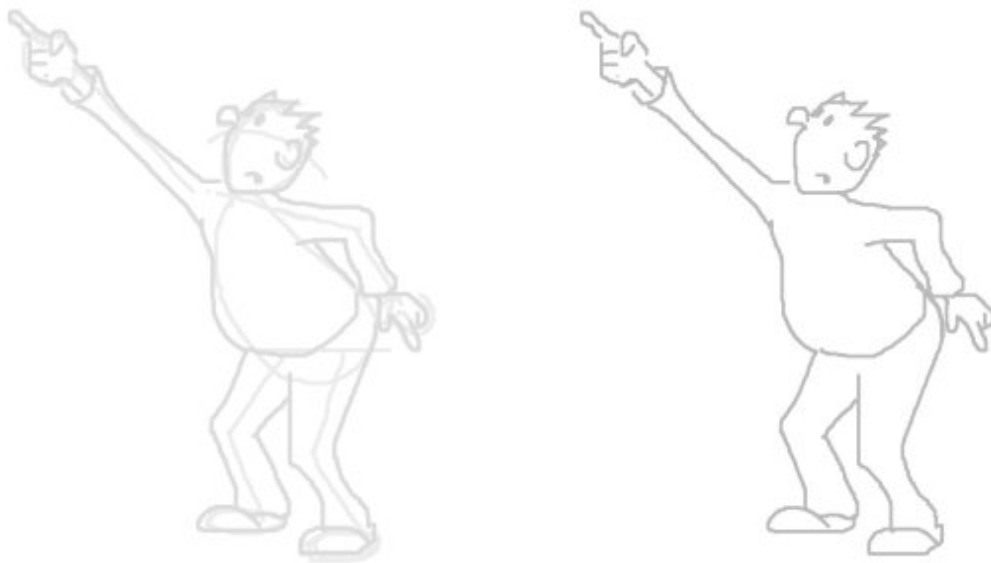
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In the next 4 steps you can see I filled in the trouser legs and made the character's belly larger, and also completed the hands and feet:



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Finally here is the complete digital "drawing". Note throughout this stage I used a white background and a color similar in tone to a pencil, a light grey. This was done simply so the drawing appeared quite "lightly drawn", a white background with deep black lines I just find more of a strain on my eyes when using a computer to draw.



Now we can see that the stick and oval lines from the original sketch are lighter than the new lines I have since added. The reason for this is that I can now REMOVE the underlying lines using the GIMP software. If you select a white color (the same as the background) and use the Fill tool you can "fill" in the lines in that original color with white, leaving only your new lines. The Fill tool is shown highlighted below:

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Although the drawing is complete, I am going to carry on and show how you can create a more professional color cartoon using GIMP. Choose a new color, in my case a light blue, and use the Fill tool to "fill in" the trouser area as on the next page.

NOTE- for the fill tool to work you must make the area you want to color complete - ie there can be no gaps, it must be completely enclosed. For example if I had left a small gap, even 1 pixel, between the trousers and one of the shoes, the shoe would also have been "filled". Think of it like this - you are physically pouring wet paint into an area of your drawing - if you leave a hole anywhere the paint will run out into other areas....

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In the drawings above I added more detail to the color cartoon, eg shading to the shoes and clothes. This was done using the "Airbrush" tool, to add a softer area of darker color. You will need to experiment with the airbrush, it takes a little getting used to. For the shading on the shirt I selected the same color as for the shirt, then created a deeper shade (as opposed to a darker shade). Using the airbrush tool I tried

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to make sweeping curved shapes around the areas I expected would be in shadow, eg under the arms and around the belly. The "Airbrush" tool is highlighted below:



I also used the airbrush tool to give the skin tones more depth, for example you can see there is a little red color on the man's cheek and under his hands and wrists, plus his hairline. This all just adds a little more realism to the character and gives a more complete look.

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Finally, here is the complete color digital cartoon, with finishing touches such as more detailed eyes added. I perhaps spent one hour on this, although much of that time was spent recording my progress for this book. In general however if you can create this sort of cartoon using pencil and paper you can also do it using GIMP - you will just have to get used to using the mouse which may take a few practice attempts, and even then occasionally it can be tricky. However the advantages of being able to undo, save, erase etc, means it is worth persevering.



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Conclusion

In my case no matter if I am drawing cartoons, sketches, or even creating a large commissioned oil painting for a customer, I always use traditional materials and techniques. The only other equipment I have purchased is a scanner so I could quickly and easily scan my smaller work, and a digital camera for photographing my larger paintings. However that is simply my personal preference, and you may find working with digital software preferable. In which case try free GIMP first.

In conclusion I would again recommend not spending any money on additional hardware OR software until you are sure you need it - hone your skills using pencil and paper, try GIMP for digital cartooning, and if all you need is a way to upload your pencil drawings into the computer you can simply buy a \$30 A4 scanner. Only once technology is the factor holding you back from achieving your goals should you spend substantial extra money.

Above all, enjoy drawing!

Good Luck!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Iain". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Iain McDonald

<http://www.Cartoon-Drawing-Secrets.com>

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Digital Art Resources:

<http://www.gimp.org> - Free Open Source graphics utility.

<http://www.gimp.org/tutorials/> - Excellent free GIMP tutorials.

<http://www.adobe.com> - Home of Photoshop, Flash and Illustrator.

<http://digitalart.org> - stunning examples of what can be achieved in Digital Art.